Breathe, You Are Alive

Sharing The Practice Of Mindfulness With Children and Youth

Joe Reilly Special Studies Course, Spring/Summer 2011

The Practice

Mindfulness is a practice of bringing full attention into the present moment. The practitioner brings their mind back to their body by focusing on their breathing.

Roots

Mindfulness practice has its roots in Buddhist teaching but can be taught and practiced by people in any faith tradition and even in secular contexts, including schools, neighborhood and community centers, and prisons.

Plum Village

This special studies course was sponsored by the Office of Global Activities (OGA) and Professor Edie Lewis. During the summer of 2011 I studied and practiced mindfulness with Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh and the community of mindful living in the Plum Village monastery, located in southern France.

The Problem

Children and youth in the United States are facing an ever-increasing amount of risk factors in their families and in society, creating greater levels of stress and anxiety as well as conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and depression.

Some Solutions

Mindfulness offers many practical exercises that empower young people to face and move through difficulties in their lives without resorting to drugs, alcohol, or suicide. I worked with the children's program at Plum Village, which uses songs, games, connections with nature, and simple meditation exercises to teach mindfulness to children of many different nationalities.

The Challenge

Practicing mindfulness in the supportive environment of Plum Village is not difficult. The challenge is to bring mindfulness into classrooms and communities who do not have access to the monastery. I look forward to continuing to explore this challenge in my work with economically disadvantaged children and youth in the US.

More Info...

I will give a more in-depth presentation on **Wednesday October 26th from 12:30-2pm in 3752 SSWB. Please attend!**